<u>REMARKS</u>

This application has been carefully reviewed in response to the Office Action dated October 11, 2006. Claims 1 to 66 are in the application. Claims 1, 6, 15, 17, 29 to 31, 36, 45, 47 and 59 to 66 are the independent claims. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

A typographical error was noticed in Figure 42. In particular, in step S4206, "REJECTION" should be replaced by "APPROVAL". A replacement sheet is submitted herewith which corrects the error.

Claims 5 and 35 were objected to under 37 C.F.R. § 1.75(c) for allegedly failing to further limit the subject matter of a previous claim. In particular, the Office Action alleged that "[calling] for a certain period not to carry out the step of making decision" does not limit the corresponding independent claims. In response, Claims 5 and 35 have been amended to clarify that a period for prohibiting an approval decision is determined, and that the approval request is rejected in the case that a current time is identified as within the prohibition period. Withdrawal of this rejection is therefore respectfully requested.

Claims 5 and 35 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, for alleged indefiniteness. Specifically, these claims were rejected for allegedly having insufficient antecedent basis for the phrase "the current time". This rejection is traversed, since the plain meaning of "the current time" is believed to be clear to one of ordinary skill in the art. Nonetheless, without conceding the correctness of this rejection, Claims 5 and

35 have been amended to recite "a current time". Withdrawal of the rejection is therefore respectfully requested.

Claims 1 to 18, 26 to 48 and 56 to 66 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) over U.S. Patent No. 5,978,779 (Stein), and Claims 19 to 25 and 49 to 55 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Stein. Reconsideration and withdrawal of these rejections are respectfully requested.

The present invention generally concerns approval or rejection of an approval request, and typically involves at least three distinct entities: a client terminal (from which the request usually originates), a service server, and an approval service provider. The approval request is prepared based on values entered by a user of the client terminal. For example, as shown in Figure 12, a user can input information such as the name of a desired product and a delivery date, from which a purchase approval request is created. A sample purchase request is depicted in Figure 13, in which requester "TARO" has requested "LITTLE SIGN OF AUTUMN". Thus, in the present invention, a user is ordinarily able to customize a purchase approval request. The approval request is then approved or rejected based on the approval service.

Additionally, in the present invention, the approval service includes a decision condition set by a user of the approval service provider. For example, as described at page 15 of the specification, various conditions for approval in an approval service are set by an approval decider. In this regard, the approval service provider is the terminal used by the approval decider. See, e.g., Figures 2 to 4. Figure 19 indicates examples of conditions in the approval decision information, such as the cost of "MUSIC"

from device "COMPO" for user "TAKUYA". In one embodiment depicted in Figure 50, the approval decider inserts a card containing "MUSIC" decision information into the service provider, and an approval service is prepared from his decision information and registered in a service server.

By virtue of this arrangement, in which a decision condition is set by a user of an approval service provider, it is ordinarily possible to provide conditions for approval services which might not be stored at a requester's apparatus, and the approval services can be used to process approval requests from the requester.

Referring specifically to claim language, independent Claim 1 is directed to an information processing apparatus. The apparatus includes receiving means for receiving an approval service which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider, storage means for storing the approval service received by the receiving means, approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the information processing apparatus, decision means for deciding whether or not to approve the prepared approval request, based on the stored approval service, and output means for outputting the result of the decision of the decision means.

Claims 31 and 61 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the apparatus of Claim 1.

Independent Claim 6 is directed to an approval system. The approval system includes a service server for managing plural approval services registered by an approval service provider and a client terminal having approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal.

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The client terminal further includes acquisition means for searching for and acquiring an approval service matching the approval request, among the plural approval services registered in the service server, wherein the approval service includes a decision condition set by a user of the approval service provider. The client terminal also includes decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request based on the acquired approval service, and output means for outputting the result of the decision of the decision performing means.

Claims 36 and 62 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 6.

Independent Claim 15 is directed to a service server. The service server includes approval service storage means for storing plural approval services instructed for registration by an approval service provider, wherein each of the approval services includes a decision condition set by a user of the approval service provider. The service server also includes transmission means for searching for an approval service matching an approval request based on a search instruction received from an external apparatus, and transmitting the approval service located by the search to the external apparatus. The external apparatus decides whether or not to approve the approval request based on the transmitted approval service. The approval request is prepared based on values entered by a user.

Claims 45 and 63 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the server of Claim 15.

Independent Claim 17 is directed to an approval system including a service server, a client terminal and a request server. The service server manages plural approval

services registered by an approval service provider, wherein each of the approval services includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider. The client terminal includes approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal. The request server includes approval request storage means for storing the approval request prepared in the client terminal, acquisition means for searching for and acquiring an approval service matching the approval request stored in the approval request storage means, among the plural approval services registered in the service server, decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request, based on the acquired approval service, and output means for outputting the result of the decision of the decision performing means.

Claims 47 and 64 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 17.

Independent Claim 29 is directed to an approval system including a service server and a client terminal. The service server manages plural approval services registered by an approval service provider, and each of the approval services includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider. The client terminal includes approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal, search means for searching for an approval service matching the approval request, among the plural approval services registered in the service server, transmission means for transmitting the approval request to the service server, in the case that the approval service is located by the search means, and reception means for

receiving the result of approval decision for the approval request transmitted from the service server. The service server includes decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the approval request transmitted from the client terminal, based on the approval service matching the approval request, and transmission means for transmitting the result of the approval decision to the client terminal.

Claims 59 and 65 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 29.

Independent Claim 30 is directed to an approval system including a service server, a client terminal and a request server. The service server manages plural approval services registered by an approval service provider, and each of the approval services includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider. The client terminal includes approval request preparing means for preparing an approval request based on values entered by a user of the client terminal. The request server includes approval request storage means for storing the approval request prepared in the client terminal. The request server further includes approval request storage means for storing the approval request prepared in the client terminal, search means for searching for an approval service matching the approval request stored in the approval request storage means, among the plural approval services registered in the service server, transmission means for transmitting the approval service to the service server, in the case that the approval service is located by the search means, and reception means for receiving the result of approval decision for the approval request from the service server. The service server includes decision performing means for performing the approval decision for the

approval request transmitted from the request server, based on the approval service

matching the approval request, and transmission means for transmitting the result of the

approval decision to the request server.

Claims 60 and 66 are directed to a method and a computer program,

respectively, substantially in accordance with the system of Claim 30.

The applied art is not seen to disclose or to suggest the features of the

present invention, and in particular is not seen to disclose or suggest at least the features of

(i) an approval service which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval

service provider, and of (ii) an approval request prepared based on values entered by a user.

As understood by Applicants, Stein is directed to a system for structuring

relationships between a financial services provider (FSP) and its clients. Each entity

transacting business with the FSP is assigned an identifier (CCID), and a relationship is

established between each identifier and at least one other entity. The CCID allows the

FSP's users to access information and conduct business with all entities regardless of

whether the entity is a client or a third party. See Stein, Abstract.

Page 4 of the Office Action asserts that Stein (Figures 1 to 3 and Column 6,

lines 1 to 25) discloses a storage step of storing an approval service set by an approval

service provider.

However, Stein is not even seen to disclose an approval service provider,

much less a user of an approval service provider setting decision conditions for an approval

service. In particular, the cited portions of Stein simply refer to the creation of a CCID

using input from an FSP user, and approval of the CCID at the FSP. See Stein, Column 5,

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line 24 to Column 6, line 25. However, as seen by Applicants, Stein's CCID approval process is confined to the FSP, and no other entity is involved. See Stein, Column 5, lines 50 to 65. Therefore, while Stein's FSP may approve the CCID, there is no approval service provider which provides the FSP with an approval service. Rather, as best understood by Applicants, Stein's only approval process exists within the FSP, and Stein does not receive approval services from an approval service provider.

In contrast, as can be seen from at least Figures 2, 4, 5 and 20 of the present application, the present invention features an approval service provider which provides a client terminal (or other apparatus) with an approval service. No such entity is seen to exist in Stein, whose CCID approval process originates solely at the FSP.

Since Stein does not disclose an approval service provider, Stein also cannot disclose the attendant benefits of such an arrangement, such as providing approval services other than those stored at Stein's FSP.

Moreover, Stein is also not seen to disclose or suggest that an approval request is prepared based on values entered by a user.

Specifically, as understood by Applicants, no user is involved at all in requesting approval of Stein's CCID. Rather, the only input by the FSP user is information to create a new entity. See Stein, Column 5, lines 25 to 27. However, as shown in Stein's Figure 1, once the entity is created, there is no return to the user for input to request an approval. See Stein, Figure 1. Rather, the CCID is sent for approval automatically by the system. See Stein, Figure 1 and Column 5, lines 50 to 53. The only return to the user is if additional information is required to create the entity. See Stein, Column 5, line 65 to

Column 6, line 6. Even then, however, once the FSP user provides the additional information, the CCID is automatically sent off for approval. See Stein, Figure 1 and Column 6, lines 1 to 5. Thus, in Stein, an "approval request" is not prepared based on input from a user.

The Office Action also refers to Figures 2 and 3 of Stein. However, these figures are not seen to provide anything which remedies the shortcomings of Stein as discussed above.

Accordingly, Stein is not seen to disclose or suggest at least the features of (i) an approval service which includes a decision condition set by a user of an approval service provider, and of (ii) an approval request prepared based on values entered by a user.

Therefore, Claims 1, 6, 15, 17, 29 to 31, 36, 45, 47, and 59 to 66 are believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is respectfully requested.

The other claims in the application are each dependent from the independent claims discussed above and are therefore believed to be allowable over the applied references for at least the same reasons. Because each dependent claim is deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual consideration of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

Turning to a formal matter, Applicants respectfully request that the next Office communication include an initialed Form PTO-1449 indicating that the documents cited in the Information Disclosure Statement dated May 2, 2002 have been considered.

No other matters being raised, the entire application is believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is courteously solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

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<u>IN THE DRAWINGS</u>:

Please replace Figure 42 with the attached replacement sheet in which, in step S4206, "REJECTION" has been replaced by "APPROVAL".